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Soviet Challenge Pulls U.S., China Closer

By Henry S. Bradsher
Washington Star Staff Writer

The newly disclosed cooperation between China and the United States in spying on the Soviet Union is part of a widening collaboration by Peking and Washington against Soviet power, according to State Department officials.

The two countries, which share a common concern about Soviet mili-

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tary strength and actions, have been cooperating in support of Afghan guerrillas since the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan 18 months ago. They

have agreed on political support for the resistance to the Soviet-backed Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, and U.S. officials now are talking about reassessing their reluctance to join China in supporting the resistance militarily too.

In other parts of the world, both America and China have been united in their urging of countries to stand up to Soviet pressure. But on some subjects, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the future of the Korean peninsula, there still are clear differences.

While the cooperation has aroused little controversy here—even supporters of the Chinese Nationalist regime on Taiwan have not made much objection so long as U.S. military sales to Taiwan continue—it has been the subject of dispute inside China.

U.S. officials said an important development in that dispute was the publication Wednesday by the main Peking newspaper, People's Daily, of an article sharply attacking the Soviet Union. U.S. analysts said the article seemed to be an effort to justify closer ties to the United States.

Those ties were reinforced by the

visit to China this week of Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig. As he was leaving, long-whispered accounts of Chinese-American cooperation in electronic monitoring of the Soviet Union began to leak out in Washington.

Officials of both the Carter and Reagan administrations disclosed that the United States installed in the mountains of western China last year highly sophisticated monitoring equipment for Chinese technicians to use in spying on Soviet missile tests and other military developments. Data from the equipment is analyzed in the United States and the results are shared with China.

The equipment replaced American-operated monitoring stations in Iran that were lost when the shah fell in early 1979. The Carter administration had worried then that other, more remote monitoring stations would not be able to make the kind of precise electronic measurements needed to keep track of Soviet missile improvements.

The United States turned to China, the geographically obvious answer. The fact that the Chinese government was willing to help showed the maturing of its relationship with the United States under the pressure of common concern about Soviet actions and growing military strength.

Six years earlier China had rejected a U.S. offer of reconnaissance satellite intelligence on Soviet troop movements near the Chinese border. At the time, friendliness with the United States was more controversial in China.

A political struggle was under way between the "Gang of Four"—composed of leftist followers of Chairman Mao Tse-tung—and more pragmatic officials now led by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping.

Although Deng won that struggle after Mao died in 1976, echoes of it

have been heard since. They still appear occasionally in allegorical articles in the Chinese press suggesting that China should maintain a more neutral, uncommitted position in the competition between Moscow and Washington.

Wednesday's People's Daily article on the Sino-Soviet border dispute was a firm rebuttal of such attitudes, government analysts here said.

The article accused Moscow of violating a 1969 border understanding, provoking border clashes and exerting military pressure on China. "Obviously," it concluded, "the Soviet Union's military threat and its hegemonistic policy toward China constitute an essential obstacle to the solution of the Sino-Soviet border issue and to the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations."

The effect of the article was to withdraw a 1979 Chinese offer to set aside the border dispute while trying to improve relations with Moscow in other fields. Nothing ever came of that, and now China's position seems to have hardened.

The hardening appeared to have been timed to coincide with and justify the closer relationship with the United States arising from Haig's visit. But Chinese officials had not counted on the leakage here of the joint operation to spy on the Soviets.

Now that the secret co-operation has become known, it could cause new debate inside China about becoming too firmly committed to the United States, U.S. officials suggested.